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Transcendent Lobbying: Jewish Prayer for Trans People as Resilience, Embodiment, and Sacred Alignment

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Abstract

In recent years, scholarship has increasingly explored the intersections of theology, liturgy, and transgender identities. At the same time, transgender individuals continue to encounter resistance, exclusion, and stigmatization within many religious settings, where gender diversity is frequently framed as incompatible with established theological norms. Against this backdrop, this study examines the emergence of contemporary non-Orthodox Jewish prayers written by and for transgender and non-binary individuals. Drawing on a corpus of trans-specific liturgical texts, I argue that these prayers function as sites of religious and social negotiation through which marginalized identities seek recognition within existing religious frameworks. Rather than merely expressing personal spirituality, they constitute collective cultural practices that redefine the boundaries of belonging, legitimacy, and sacred personhood. Through poetic, theological, and political language, these texts challenge dominant assumptions about gender, embodiment, and religious authority while remaining intelligible within the broader Jewish liturgical tradition. The analysis demonstrates how trans prayer constructs the body not as a problem to be corrected but as a legitimate locus of sacred experience and religious meaning. In doing so, these prayers reconfigure the relationship between embodiment and spirituality, framing gender transition as a process of revelation, authenticity, and renewal rather than rupture or deviation. More broadly, they serve as mechanisms through which transgender Jews symbolically negotiate access to religious institutions, communal recognition, and theological legitimacy. I conceptualize this process as *transcendent lobbying*: a form of spiritual activism through which liturgical actors seek to reshape religious discourse and expand the symbolic boundaries of the sacred. Viewed sociologically, these prayers are not only theological texts but also cultural interventions that contest established power relations and create new possibilities for religious inclusion, visibility, and collective belonging.

Keywords: transgender; prayer; Jewish liturgy; theology; recognition

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1. Introduction

Last winter (2025) *CCAR Journal* (CCAR Journal—formally titled CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly—is a quarterly scholarly and literary journal published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the main professional organization of Reform rabbis in North America) published a special issue "Opening the Doors to LGBTQIA+ Clergy: Past, Present, and Future" [1]—focused on the journey of LGBTQIA+ clergy, from early struggles to present-day progress and visions for the future. LGBTQ+ Reform rabbis expressed their minds and reflections which examined the milestones, challenges, and triumphs of LGBTQIA+ clergy, offering insight into the evolving landscape of Jewish

leadership and inclusion. This collection was published at a particularly difficult moment for the American transgender and non-binary community. As transgender people face severe challenges under governmental auspices, non-binary and transgender children in particular contend with struggles for recognition, exposure to violence, and pervasive transphobia, often within legislative arenas and other public, elected spheres, including the White House [2,3]. Against this backdrop, the voices gathered in this issue articulate a liberal Jewish response that affirms human dignity and advances human rights.

Since the mid-20th century, Reform Judaism, rooted in Enlightenment-era Europe and grounded in the value of gender equality, has sought to provide a religious alternative to traditional perspectives that view homosexuality as sinful. The earliest LGBTQ+ synagogues established in Los Angeles, Chicago and San Francisco introduced Jewish liturgy for the LGBTQ+ lifecycle, encompassing physical and spiritual experiences, commemorative practices, and memory rituals [4–6]. The creation of specialized prayer books (*siddurim*) that include LGBTQ prayers—such as *Sha'ar Zahav Siddur*—demonstrates the ways in which Jewish tradition expands its boundaries and generates queer ritual creativity.

Subsequently, alongside the recognition of lifecycle ceremonies for LGBTQ+ individuals, the Reform Rabbinical School also opened its doors to the transgender community (See "Resolution on the Rights of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People": https://urj.org/what-we-believe/resolutions/resolution-rights-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-people) (accessed on 20 May 2026). In recent years, transgender and non-binary individuals have been ordained as rabbis, leading communities, and contributing to Reform liturgical creation. Therefore, Reform Judaism, as a non-halachic movement, is recognized today as one of the central religious bodies promoting LGBTQ+ rights and recognizing LGBTQ+ individuals within the Jewish and broader public spheres.

The mission of LGBTQ+ Inclusion, especially for non-binary individuals, requires creating a safe space, which is expressed, among other things, in written language. Language both reflects and constructs LGBTQ+ identities within sociolinguistics, showing that linguistic practices shape community, identity, and belonging, not just reflect them [7]. The Jewish ritual experience is a product of textual encounters, where the arrangement of prayers and blessings plays a crucial role in the liturgy. For instance, Marcia Falk [8], one of the most influential pioneers in creating degendered Hebrew liturgy, helped through poetic and theological innovation shape a more expansive and welcoming Jewish ritual language. Her work reimagines traditional Jewish blessings and prayers by removing gendered language for God and worshippers, offering inclusive alternatives that speak to a broader spectrum of identities.

According to trans Jewish cantor Ze'evi Tovlev [9], *"Nonbinary Hebrew enables us to take this next step in revolutionizing our gendered liturgy… We Reform Jews are a Movement founded on the concept of choice through knowledge. We know that there are already nonbinary Jews in our communities, and the number of nonbinary Jews will only continue to grow. If we are to create communities of belonging where nonbinary Jews can pray as their authentic selves, we must expand our liturgical options, either in the next iteration of our Reform* siddur *or even sooner. We must incorporate nonbinary Hebrew into our everyday liturgy, not only in special certificates or personalized rituals. We need to be in the* siddur *alongside the rest of our community. We need to be able to choose language that accurately describes our lived experiences, not only in English, but also in Hebrew. Liturgists over generations have grappled with the challenge of previously unavoidable binary language in Hebrew liturgy" (P. 125).*

Based on a textual analysis of trans liturgy, I examine how transgender prayer contributes to the development of resilience, coping mechanisms, and positive meaning-making for trans individuals, and how it reconciles religious contradictions. Additionally, I

explore how prayer articulates a queer typology of struggle against trans stigma, violence, and discrimination, and how it fosters subjective, identity-based empowerment.

I suggest the term "transcendent lobbying" aims to illuminate the creative tension between practical political action and a spiritual realm perceived as sublime, metaphysical, or inaccessible. The term lobbying is rooted in spheres of power struggles, strategy, and efforts to influence governmental or organizational systems. In contrast, transcendent refers to the divine, the beyond-human dimension, existing outside conventional social structures. In this context, transcendent lobbying serves as an interpretive framework for understanding how transgender prayers exceed the traditional religious function of supplication or pleading, and instead operate as acts of political demand—a direct appeal to the Divine aimed at shifting power dynamics within theological discourse itself. This is a process in which the transgender subject is not merely subject to the mercy of the religious order but actively seeks to transform it from within, employing poetic language, embodied and identity-based experience, and a profound moral vision.

Moreover, the expression "transcendent lobbying" articulates a call for moral redress of the existing order—one that does not end with social demands but extends to the foundations of religion itself. These prayers, written by and on behalf of the trans community, reconfigure the liturgical space as a site where "doing politics" is possible not only toward earthly institutions, but also toward tradition itself, and even toward the Divine as it is culturally imagined. In this way, liturgy becomes a space of resistance and creativity, aiming to insert new voices into religious discourse and expand the boundaries of recognition and visibility. Thus, the use of a charged and provocative term such as *transcendent lobbying* enables an analysis of this action that acknowledges its political and ideological contexts while simultaneously preserving its spiritual, ethical, and poetic dimensions. Previous studies examining queer prayers for Coming Out of The Closet [10], the Transgender Day of Remembrance [11] and the creation of transgender Judaica [12] have demonstrated how memory practices and religious material culture contribute to the formation of collective consciousness, modes of struggle, and trans-Jewish belonging. The present study extends this line of inquiry by exploring how liturgical practices become sites of embodied, spiritual, and social meaning-making within transgender Jewish experiences.

This work builds upon and draws on previous studies that have highlighted the power of Jewish tradition, language, and ritual practice to shape, affirm, and render visible queer identities, subjects, and expressions. *Trans Talmud: Androgynes and Eunuchs in Rabbinic Literature* by Max Strassfeld [13] offers a rereading of rabbinic literature that challenges the assumption that gender in rabbinic Judaism is organized in a stable, binary system. Through the analysis of figures such as the androgynos, tumtum, and eunuch, Strassfeld argues that rabbinic texts are not merely concerned with gender "exceptions," but rather reveal a legal and conceptual system in which gender is a flexible, relational, and context-dependent category. Instead of treating these figures as deviations from a norm, he proposes understanding them as a window into rabbinic thinking in which body and gender are not fixed essences but are shaped by function, circumstance, and interpretive context. This approach does not aim to project modern transgender identities directly onto ancient texts, but rather to show that these texts contain internal fissures that destabilize binary gender categories. In doing so, Strassfeld opens a theoretical space for queer readings of Jewish tradition and provides a foundation for understanding contemporary practices—such as trans prayer—as continuations of existing textual tensions rather than external innovations imposed on the tradition. In addition, the prayers examined in this study may illuminate broader projects and creative initiatives for establishing queer Jewish discourse and practice, such as *Toratah*. *Toratah* [14] illustrates how contemporary Jewish liturgy can function as a space for reinterpreting tradition through queer and feminist perspectives.

Like trans prayers, it seeks to create religious language that affirms and renders visible embodied experiences of gender that do not fit binary norms. The connection between the two lies in their shared use of Jewish liturgical forms to produce meaning, resilience, and recognition for queer and trans subjects. While trans prayer in this study emphasizes resilience, embodiment, and sacred alignment through what I term "transcendent lobbying," Toratah operates more broadly by rewriting biblical and liturgical texts to center queer and female experiences. In both cases, liturgy becomes not only an expression of faith but also a practice of subject formation, where body, identity, and tradition are co-constructed through creative interpretation and resistance to fixed gender orders.

Following Ladin's work [15,16], which revolves around the exploration of identity formation at the intersections of Jewish and trans experiences, this liturgical act expresses how individuals navigate and construct their identities in relation to both religious and gender identities. It highlights the complexities and challenges inherent in these dual processes. Trans Jewish liturgy is an outcome of personal narratives, societal contexts, and the evolving meanings of authenticity and belonging within Jewish communities. This discussion builds on these theological directions and seeks to expand them by demonstrating how liturgy is understood as a platform for reflecting transgender realities and establishing a new gendered order.

2. Sanctifying Nonbinary Gender: Transing Theology and Liturgy

Trans theology is not a spiritual abstraction or a utopian philosophy detached from reality. Rather, it emerges from lived experience—a narrative shaped by pain, struggle, concealment, and shame across multiple spheres of life. For example, Ladin's [16] approach to trans theology is rooted in her childhood, where being trans fostered a profound sense of intimacy with God. Both her gender identity and her relationship with God existed outside the norms of the bourgeois, assimilated, secular Jewish environment in which she was raised—realities that could not be voiced without inviting questions about her sanity. For Ladin, God was not a vague abstraction or mystical idea but a real and tangible presence, as immediate as cold, heat, or humidity—just as real as her parents. Yet, she felt closer to God than to them. While her parents identified her by her male body and expected social role, God alone truly knew who she was. Being trans gave her a unique sense of kinship with God. Her body concealed her true self; God had no body at all. Both, in a sense, existed in the wilderness—beyond human categories, invisible and misunderstood by those who confuse the body with the self.

These lived experiences challenge binary and dichotomous understandings of gender and embodiment and invite a creative, epistemic rethinking of the image of God itself. Similarly, Budwey [17] demonstrates how intersex Christians in Germany contest binary, heteronormative interpretations of the *imago Dei* by articulating inclusive and expansive theological reflections that affirm their existence and full humanity. Budwey argues that dominant Christian teachings, which frame the image of God in strictly male–female terms, have contributed to the dehumanization and marginalization of intersex individuals. She found that intersex Christians reinterpret the image of God in nonbinary and relational ways, thereby creating new "conditions of possibility" for imagining both God and human identity beyond rigid sex and gender binaries. This theological move supports a broader claim that the image of God cannot be confined to binary constructs and that recognizing the full spectrum of human diversity—particularly in relation to sex and gender—is not only theologically generative but also an ethical imperative.

Cheng [18], in *Radical Love*, aims to introduce and define queer theology by showing how Christian theology and queer theory intersect around the idea of radical love—a love that dissolves fixed boundaries of gender, sexuality, life and death, and the human/divine

distinction. By providing a historical overview of the development of queer theology and engaging with core Christian doctrines (such as God, Jesus Christ, creation, sin, grace, church, and sacraments), Cheng demonstrates how a queer-affirming theological perspective challenges traditional binary categories and offers a more inclusive understanding of faith and identity.

Previous research has examined the effects of the intersectionality between transgender identity and religiosity/spiritual experiences [19–21]. For example, Wang et al. [22] conclude that religiosity can serve as an important resilience resource for young transgender women. Gender-affirming religious and spiritual interventions may promote resilience among some young trans women. According to Kidd and Witten [23], existing measures of religiosity and spirituality often fail to capture the diversity of faith experiences among transgender individuals—many of whom develop unique, non-traditional spiritual frameworks—yet these spiritual and religious dimensions play a vital role in resilience and well-being throughout the life course, especially into older age. Ashok and Saranya [24] show that gender non-conforming individuals exercise significant personal spiritual agency despite institutional failures, expressed through reinterpretations of scripture, personal rituals, and queer faith communities. Their narratives challenge the rigid gender binaries in Indian religious discourse and propose a counter-theology rooted in embodiment, defiance, and reinterpretation. The study highlights the ongoing need to build religious belonging beyond cisnormative norms, affirming queer spirituality as a genuine reality rather than an anomaly.

Rev. Sabia-Tanis [25], a queer theologian and pastor, offers essential guidance for including transgender people in faith communities through *Transgender: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith*. His concept of "gender as a calling" and focus on in-between spaces provide a framework for understanding transgender spiritual journeys, Scripture, and barriers to participation, while offering practical resources for hospitality and inclusion.

All of this research demonstrates how trans and nonbinary experiences profoundly shape theology and liturgy, challenging traditional gender binaries and offering inclusive ways to understand the divine and human identity. Queer theological perspectives emphasize radical love, dissolving rigid boundaries and fostering resilience, agency, and belonging for transgender individuals. As this paper shows, creating liturgy is an act of honoring transgender spiritual journeys. These insights support the development of Jewish liturgical practices that recognize, celebrate, and include trans identities within ritual and communal life—both for clergy, who create the liturgy, and for congregants, who participate in worship.

3. Methods

This study presents a textual analysis of six prayers dedicated to the transgender community and constitutes only a partial presentation of a broader and more comprehensive research project I have conducted on transgender liturgy and ritual practices. Over recent years, I have collected a wide range of prayers composed for LGBTQ+ communities and have carried out participant observation in rituals dedicated to LGBTQ+ congregants in Reform communities in Israel and the United States. In addition, I have conducted in-depth interviews with participants in order to better understand their worldviews, religious interpretations, and lived experiences.

In this discussion, the written prayer occupies a central role in understanding the phenomenon under study. Accordingly, I present a close textual analysis of the prayers themselves, alongside excerpts of the liturgical texts. Textual analysis, as an interpretive qualitative research method, is grounded in the sociolinguistic assumption that language does not merely reflect social reality but actively participates in its construction [26]. As a

cultural instrument, language holds significant power in shaping the subjective ways in which individuals and communities understand, experience, and inhabit their worlds [27].

Religious texts produced over time by diverse communities reveal underlying power relations, mechanisms of social regulation and control, and, not infrequently, the complex and tension-filled relationship between the divine and the individual believer [28]. I am fully aware that, like all interpretive analyses, this reading is necessarily partial and situated. Nevertheless, I argue that the very act of making these texts visible and subjecting them to focused textual analysis constitutes a meaningful analytical intervention in its own right. This approach should not be understood merely as a movement from individual interpretation toward the text (that is, research based solely on how individuals interpret religious texts), but rather as an examination of the text itself as a cultural, theological, and social actor.

Even though I ultimately did not include interviews with trans individuals to see how they use or experience the prayers, I felt it was important to incorporate the voice of the rabbis who authored the prayer. For rabbis who were willing, I included their perspectives alongside the analysis, and in my view, this enriched the examination of both the prayer as a product and its creator. My future research may illuminate how worshippers—the consumers of the prayer—engage with it (though, as noted, this is not the research question that defines this interpretive study).

I located the prayers in two significant arenas. The primary arena is textual and print-based: a unique queer prayer book titled *Mishkan Ga'avah: Where Pride Dwells: A Celebration of Jewish Life and Ritual* [29], edited by Rabbi and activist Denise Eger. This is a very distinctive siddur that brings together many prayers dedicated to the LGBTQ+ life cycle, and it links two central identity axes of Jewish LGBTQ+ life—the religious axis and the gender/sexual axis. A wide range of prayers appears in this volume, some of them written by trans rabbis who composed prayers grounded in their own lived experiences. In my other studies, I have analyzed additional prayers from this important prayer book.

Another key source in which I identified prayers is a digital arena—an online platform that hosts queer prayers, known as: The *Open Siddur Project* [30] is a volunteer-driven, non-profit, non-commercial, non-denominational, and non-prescriptive digital archive of Jewish prayer literature and liturgical resources, historic and contemporary, familiar and obscure, composed in every era, region, and language in which Jews have prayed. Its principal goal is to provide an open-access platform where texts of Jewish devotional practice can be freely accessed, searched, and reused under libre or public-domain terms, enabling individuals, communities, and scholars to craft, adapt, and publish their own siddurim (prayer books) and related liturgical works. By making these materials digitally available and openly licensed, the project aims to empower personal autonomy, preserve diverse customs and traditions, support creative engagement with liturgy, and foster openness and vitality in Jewish cultural and spiritual life.

Another virtual resource is *Ritualwell.org*, an online Jewish ritual resource that aims to help people *find, create, and share Jewish rituals, prayers, poems, and ceremonies* for holidays, lifecycle events, everyday moments, and life transitions. It makes both traditional and contemporary, inclusive Jewish rituals easily accessible to a wide audience and invites users to contribute their own creations, fostering spiritual exploration, creativity, and meaningful Jewish practice.

It is important to clarify that the prayers included in this analysis were selected through a systematic coding process of a broader corpus of LGBTQ+ liturgical texts. The selection focused specifically on prayers explicitly addressed to transgender individuals and communities rather than to the wider LGBTQ+ population. Texts were identified through thematic and linguistic markers referring to trans identities, experiences of gender transition, and

processes of bodily, emotional, and social transformation. Particular attention was given to incorporating prayers that reflect diverse embodied experiences, different stages of gender transition, and a range of psychological and spiritual states, recognizing the heterogeneity of transgender lives and identities.

These prayers are not confined to a single ritual setting but circulate across multiple liturgical and communal contexts. Many are performed in Reform synagogues and LGBTQ+-affirming communities during Pride Shabbat services, Transgender Day of Visibility observances, and Trans Day of Remembrance commemorations. Others are used in individual spiritual practices, personal life-cycle rituals, or private moments of transition, illustrating the movement between public liturgy and personal religious experience. Most of the material analyzed originates in North America, which remains a primary site for the development of contemporary queer Jewish liturgy. At the same time, an emerging, though still limited, body of queer and LGBTQ+ liturgical practice can be identified in Israel, primarily developed by LGBTQ+ rabbis. In many cases, these Israeli liturgical forms draw directly on North American models through processes of translation, adaptation, and reinterpretation.

Finally, the interviews conducted as part of this study included individuals directly involved in the creation, performance, and facilitation of these prayers. This methodological approach enabled an examination of the prayers not only as textual artifacts but also as embodied socio-religious practices situated within specific communal and ritual contexts.

Furthermore, in line with interpretive qualitative research traditions, the positionality of the researcher plays a crucial role in the processes of interpretation and analysis. As a gay man who has himself navigated embodied and identity-based experiences of tension, transformation, and negotiation, there were moments in which I encountered these prayers as part of a broader queer identity narrative to which I feel connected and, in certain respects, belong. At the same time, it is important for me to state explicitly that I can never fully grasp or authentically inhabit the lived experiences of individuals with non-binary gender identities, given my position as a cisgender man. I do not claim to approximate their standpoint in a complete or unmediated way, nor do I believe such total identification is possible.

Nevertheless, I suggest that this very distance—this gap in embodied and identity-based experience—may itself serve as an analytical resource. It may illuminate aspects of the prayers and their social meanings that a researcher who is themselves transgender might understandably take for granted, thereby opening additional interpretive possibilities rather than foreclosing them.

4. Results

In this section, I will present the analysis of the findings, that is, the presentation of the prayers and their analysis. First, I will introduce the prayer itself, and then I will provide its interpretive analysis. The analysis, as will be evident, is supported by various sources in order to maintain a holistic perspective, since the prayer is situated within a broader discourse. In addition, alongside the analysis, I have included several quotes from the authors of the prayers themselves to enrich the discussion and to connect the text—the final product, the prayer—with the intention and interpretation that preceded its creation.

A.

Prayer for Transgender Justice

Rabbi Emily Aviva Kapor-Mater

Our God and God of our ancestors, we ask your blessing upon our community, the holy assembly of all transgender people, and upon all who cross over the boundaries of life. Grant us life and happiness from your abundance of blessings, and spread over us the shelter of Your peace. Grant us the strength to create and to be created, to form and to be formed, and to fulfill Your will to love all creation and to pursue peace. Teach us truth and justice, for You are a shield for all the oppressed. Send relief and righteousness to all our community, and may Your goodness be with us as it was with our ancestors. Blessed are You, God who makes justice and peace for all who cross over the boundaries of life.

This prayer (published here—https://ritualwell.org/ritual/prayer-for-transgender-justice/) (accessed on 1 May 2026), written by Rabbi Emily Aviva Kapor-Mater (Rabbi Kapor-Mater is a radical transfeminist rabbi and activist. She is an autistic, transgender woman. Her rabbinic work focuses on creating innovative yet traditional Jewish law, liturgy, and ritual to celebrate and affirm trans identities and experiences. She also advocates for acceptance and accessibility for people with visible and invisible disabilities), articulates a distinctly transgender theology of resilience by framing trans existence not as deviation or rupture, but as a sacred collective condition embedded within divine order. By invoking "our community, the holy assembly of all transgender people, and all who cross over the boundaries of life," the prayer immediately performs a symbolic reversal of marginalization: those historically positioned at the religious periphery are reconstituted as a *kehilla kedosha*, a holy congregation. This move functions as a mechanism of positive meaning-making, transforming lived experiences of exclusion, dysphoria, and vulnerability into sources of spiritual legitimacy and communal belonging. In this sense, prayer becomes a coping space that re-narrates trans life as divinely witnessed, blessed, and sustained.

Resilience is further cultivated through the prayer's emphasis on divine protection and continuity—"spread over us the shelter of Your peace" (The expression recurs in many prayers, especially in prayers asking for protection and safeguarding. It represents a direct connection to the divine realm, where God provides spiritual shelter) and "may Your goodness be with us as it was with our ancestors." By situating transgender experience within an unbroken covenantal lineage, the prayer reconciles a core religious contradiction often faced by trans Jews: the perceived tension between tradition and gender variance. Rather than rejecting ancestral authority, the text reclaims it, asserting that transgender lives are not outside Jewish sacred history but are held within the same divine care afforded to previous generations. This theological strategy mitigates alienation and offers a reparative hermeneutic through which trans individuals can inhabit religious tradition without self-erasure.

The prayer also advances a non-dualistic understanding of subjectivity and embodiment [31] (Furey examines how religion studies have treated body and subjectivity as integrated phenomena rather than dualistically separated, offering a framework very relevant to embodied theology and subjectivity), portraying selfhood not as an autonomous

entity separate from divine action, but as emerging through an ongoing process of mutual formation, evident in the paired verbs "to create and to be created, to form and to be formed. These formulations resonate with transgender experiences of gender transition while simultaneously grounding them in divine intentionality. Transition is not framed as rebellion against creation but as participation in an ongoing sacred process. Such language enables a queer typology of struggle in which transformation, becoming, and fluidity are elevated as religious virtues rather than theological threats. Prayer thus operates as a site where trans embodiment is aligned with divine will, countering stigmatizing discourses that portray trans identities as artificial, sinful, or illegitimate.

Moreover, the prayer explicitly politicizes vulnerability by naming God as "a shield for all the oppressed" and by petitioning for "justice and peace for all who cross over the boundaries of life." Here, the liturgical voice shifts from individual affirmation to collective resistance. Trans suffering is not privatized or psychologized; it is situated within structures of injustice that demand ethical and theological response [32,33]. In doing so, the prayer constructs a queer religious politics in which spirituality becomes a mode of protest against trans stigma, violence, and discrimination. Justice (*tzedek*) and peace (*shalom*) are not abstract ideals but moral imperatives tied directly to the survival and dignity of transgender communities.

Finally, the prayer fosters subjective and identity-based empowerment by granting trans individuals religious agency. The act of communal address—"we ask," "grant us," "teach us"—positions transgender people as legitimate speakers within the liturgical economy, capable of articulating their needs, desires, and visions of justice before God. This empowerment is both personal and collective: it strengthens individual spiritual self-conception while reinforcing a shared identity grounded in sanctity, struggle, and hope. This is a very familiar trend in Jewish prayers for healing, restoration, and peace, which connect the individual to the community, thereby fostering solidarity and communal fellowship that links the individual to the collective [34]. In this way, transgender prayer emerges not merely as devotional speech but as a performative practice that sustains resilience, reconciles religious contradiction, and mobilizes a queer theology of justice and becoming.

Rabbi Kapor-Mater describes the liminal power of transgender prayer, which moves between innovation and preservation, revealing itself as evidence of the dynamism and continuity of the tradition:

> "For as long as Jews have been a praying people, Jews have tailored prayer to specific times, places, and situations. Jews have been in conversation with our own liturgy, as part of our ongoing conversation with our God, for millennia. As transgender Jews, we often struggle to find ourselves in our people's history, texts, rituals, and everything else that Jews to mark sacredness. To reach into this history, these texts, and these rituals, and to place our own bodies and souls in them, is simultaneously a revolutionary act of constructing meaning, and yet at the same time nothing particularly special. Transgender prayer is nothing more than an extension of ancient tradition: at once both deeply radical and deeply traditional".

B.

Blessings for Any Moment While Transitioning
Rabbi Elliot Kukla

Blessed are You, Eternal One our God, Ruler of time and space, the Transforming One to those who [transition/transform/cross over].

Blessed are You, Eternal One our God, Ruler of time and space, who has made me in His image and according to Her will.

Blessed are You, Eternal One our God, Ruler of time and space, who has kept us alive and sustained us and helped us to arrive at this moment.

Rabbi Elliot Kukla's (Rabbi Kukla is an American rabbi, author, chaplain, activist, and spiritual care practitioner, widely recognized for his pioneering work at the intersections of Jewish life, gender diversity, grief, disability justice, and spiritual care, see: https://elliotkukla.com/) *Blessings for Any Moment While Transitioning* exemplifies how transgender-directed prayer functions as a mechanism of resilience, coping, and positive meaning-making. The prayer situates the individual within a sacred temporal and spatial framework, invoking God as the "Ruler of time and space" and the "Transforming One." By framing transition as both a spiritual and existential journey, the prayer allows trans individuals to perceive their bodily and social transformation as meaningful, legitimized within a sacred narrative, rather than solely as a site of dysphoria or social marginalization [35]. This alignment between spiritual practice and identity provides a form of emotional and cognitive scaffolding: it affirms that one's experience of gender transition is not a deviation from divine intent, but rather an expression of the divine will itself, thus fostering coping and resilience.

The prayer also directly addresses the reconciliation of religious contradiction. Traditional religious frameworks often uphold binary gender norms, which can produce tension for trans individuals seeking spiritual legitimacy. Kukla's text subverts these binaries by acknowledging both masculine and feminine aspects of divinity—"in His image and according to Her will"—thereby creating theological space for trans embodiment. As Ladin concluded, this linguistic and symbolic inclusivity enables trans individuals to maintain a religious identity without erasing or denying their gendered experiences, demonstrating how liturgy can serve as a queer tool for negotiating faith and identity simultaneously.

From a sociological perspective, the prayer operates as a queer typology of struggle. By explicitly naming the transformative journey, invoking divine support, and recognizing the social and existential significance of the present moment, the prayer frames trans experience as an empowered act rather than a marginal one. The blessings—affirming life, divine support, and arrival at this moment—provide a ritualized means for countering stigma, internalized shame, and societal marginalization. Subjective, identity-based empowerment emerges as trans individuals integrate the ritual into their daily spiritual and emotional practices, transforming the act of prayer into a practice of resilience and a locus for self-recognition, social validation, and meaning-making. In addition, this is not only about blurring and challenging gender, but also about challenging and blurring the traditional conception of time within the context of tradition and liturgy: that is, between the sacred and the mundane, where the prayer (which is supposed to be a sacred moment) becomes interwoven with—and available for use at—any moment of the "mundane."

In sum, Kukla's prayer demonstrates that transgender-directed liturgy is not merely symbolic but constitutive of both coping and empowerment. It offers trans individuals a framework to reinterpret their experiences positively, negotiate theological tension, and cultivate agency in the face of structural and interpersonal transphobia. By centering the individual's embodied experience while invoking inclusive divine imagery, the prayer exemplifies how queer religious practice can serve as a site of resistance, affirmation, and transformative resilience.

C.

A Prayer before Beginning Hormonal Treatment

Sam Hipschman

Elohai, nishmati.

God, the soul that You have given to me is pure. When You blew the breath of life into me, it reached all the way to my deepest depths, to the place where my soul lives. That place knows no physical form. In that great expanse, where my soul dances with Yours, I know my deepest truths. My soul knows truths that do not always make sense to me or to others. It knows that when I take a chance on the unknown, my own physical form can mirror the expansiveness within me.

בָּרוּכָה אַתְּ הָאֱלֹהוּת שֶׁהֶעֱנַקְתְּ לִי אֶת הַכָּרַת הָאֱמֶת שֶׁלִּי.

B'ruchah at ha'elohut shehe'enakt li et hakarat ha'emet sheli.

Blessed is the Divine that instills within me the ability to know my deepest truths.

The experience of a transgender person before beginning hormone therapy is often marked by deep emotional tension, anticipatory anxiety, and complex self-reflection about bodily identity and selfhood. Many individuals report psychological distress related to gender incongruence and a strong desire for alignment between their internal sense of gender and their physical body, which can contribute to high levels of dysphoria, anxiety, and depression prior to medical intervention. Research indicates that gender-affirming hormone therapy is frequently associated with improvements in mental health outcomes—such as reduced depressive symptoms and increased quality of life—suggesting that the period *before* treatment may be characterized by significant psychological strain and a longing for congruence that motivates the pursuit of hormone therapy. This process highlights the psychosocial significance of the decision to begin hormone treatment and underscores the emotional and identity-related challenges that precede it [36].

The *Prayer before Beginning Hormonal Treatment* functions not merely as a devotional utterance but as a psychosocial, theological, and political practice. Operating simultaneously on existential, communal, and symbolic levels, the prayer contributes to processes of resilience, coping, and positive meaning-making, while reconciling religious contradiction and articulating a distinctly queer typology of struggle and empowerment.

This prayer operates as a practice of meaning-making in contexts marked by vulnerability, risk, and uncertainty. The initiation of hormonal treatment constitutes a biographical threshold saturated with fear, hope, medical authority, and heightened social visibility.

Rather than framing this moment as rupture or deviation, the prayer ritualizes it as a sacred crossing, thereby reconfiguring uncertainty as spiritually containable rather than destabilizing. Crucially, the prayer situates bodily transition within a continuous life narrative rather than as a break from it. By invoking *Elohai, nishmati*—a prayer traditionally recited upon waking—the speaker anchors transition within an established Jewish grammar of renewal. This narrative continuity supports resilience by resisting the fragmentation of the self into rigid "before" and "after" identities, a fragmentation frequently imposed by medical, legal, and social discourses [37].

The explicit declaration "I know my deepest truths" affirms self-knowledge as a legitimate and authoritative epistemic source. Psychologically, this strengthens an internal locus of control and counters the epistemic invalidation that trans individuals routinely encounter in medical, familial, and religious settings. Knowledge of the self is not positioned as provisional or derivative, but as foundational (Similarly, Danon identifies how intersex individuals describe their personal experiences and medical histories, which were managed by institutional bureaucracy that deprived them of their sense of self, [38]).

The phrase "when I take a chance on the unknown" names risk without pathologizing it. Here, prayer functions as a holding environment (in Winnicott's sense), one that permits fear and faith to coexist without demanding premature resolution. Such symbolic containment is essential for coping in circumstances where outcomes are uncertain and social support may be ambivalent or actively hostile.

Rather than presenting transition as the repair of a defect or the correction of a problem, the prayer frames it as alignment between inner truth and outer form: "my own physical form can mirror the expansiveness within me." This formulation constitutes a profound reversal of dominant medicalized and halakhic discourses that locate trans experience in deficiency, disorder, or contradiction. The body is neither rejected nor transcended; instead, it is invited into resonance with the soul. In doing so, the prayer challenges dualistic religious models that privilege soul over body and replaces them with a relational and dynamic anthropology. The central metaphor is not normalization, but expansiveness—offering a positive symbolic horizon in which trans embodiment is understood not as a narrowing of possibility, but as its realization.

Like the former liturgical text, this prayer does not seek to resolve religious contradiction through halakhic argumentation or theological apology. Instead, reconciliation is achieved ritually, through performance rather than doctrine. By emphasizing that the soul "knows no physical form," the prayer relocates divine intentionality away from fixed anatomy and toward relational truth. God is not portrayed as contradicted by transition, but as already present within the truth that precedes it.

The blessing formula—*Bruchah at ha'elohut*—employs feminine divine grammar and non-normative theological language. This linguistic choice subtly destabilizes the binary gender logics embedded within traditional liturgy, while simultaneously preserving the recognizable structure of blessing. Tradition is thus neither rejected nor abandoned; it is re-voiced, queered from within.

The prayer articulates a queer typology of struggle not through explicit references to oppression, but by modeling a counter-logic to stigma, violence, and discrimination. In a social world that polices trans bodies and conditions recognition on institutional approval, the prayer asserts that legitimacy flows from inner truth rather than external authorization. Authority is displaced from institution to subject, enacting a classically queer reversal of power. Moreover, transition is framed not as transgression but as a covenantal act—an ethical commitment to truth. This framing provides symbolic resources for resisting stigma and violence without internalizing shame, repositioning visibility from a site of risk to a site of moral agency.

Although articulated in the first-person singular, the prayer is readily collectivized. Its language enables trans readers to recognize themselves within a shared grammar of struggle, thereby forming what may be described as an interpretive community of resilience. Individual prayer thus becomes socially legible and communally meaningful without relinquishing its intimacy.

Thus, the prayer fosters empowerment by reconstituting subjectivity itself. The trans subject emerges not merely as a recipient of divine judgment or permission, but as a theological agent. The speaker blesses God not for changing them, but for granting recognition of truth—reversing the conventional hierarchy in which religion adjudicates the legitimacy of trans lives. Here, the trans subject becomes a knower, capable of naming truth within a sacred register.

This empowerment is articulated without triumphalism. The prayer avoids narratives of conquest, completion, or final resolution. Alignment is ongoing rather than achieved once and for all. Such a non-teleological conception of empowerment is particularly significant in contexts where discrimination, precarity, and vulnerability persist. Agency is sustained not through victory, but through continued ethical and spiritual attunement.

D.

A Prayer before Top Surgery

Rabbi Karen Bender

My God, our God, God of our ancestors, I forgive You For creating extra steps for me to be me. I am grateful for the loving support of those who understand. I am thankful for the courage of those who came before me. I pray to You that my honesty and courage will empower others to become themselves. Thank You for the gift of life and the gift of love.

I cannot wait for tomorrow.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יָהּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ רוּחַ הָעוֹלָם הַמַּדְרִיכֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם

Baruch atah Yah Eloheinu Ru'ach ha'olam hamadricheinu L'shalom.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who directs our steps to peace.

Top surgery is a gender-affirming procedure that alters chest tissue to align a person's body with their gender identity. For transmasculine and nonbinary individuals, it typically involves chest masculinization; for transfeminine individuals, it can include breast augmentation. Top surgery is linked to reduced gender dysphoria and improved well-being, with most patients reporting positive outcomes and few regrets [39].

A Prayer before Top Surgery functions not merely as a devotional utterance but as a psychosocial, theological, and political practice through which transgender prayer operates as a performance of resilience, coping, and positive meaning-making. Situated at the biographical threshold of gender-affirming surgery, the prayer addresses a moment saturated with bodily vulnerability, medical authority, fear, hope, and heightened social exposure. For trans Jews, such moments are often intensified by religious traditions that simultaneously offer belonging and reproduce exclusion. This prayer demonstrates how liturgy can mediate these tensions by transforming transition from a site of contradiction into a ritualized space of ethical and spiritual agency.

The prayer functions as a meaning-making device in the face of uncertainty and risk. The opening line— "I forgive You for creating extra steps for me to be me"—names suffering without pathologizing either the self or the body. By framing trans embodiment as involving "extra steps" rather than error or defect, the prayer resists dominant medicalized

and religious narratives that cast trans experience as deficiency. Forgiveness here operates not as submission but as an assertion of agency, allowing the speaker to integrate adversity into a coherent life narrative. This reframing supports resilience by enabling continuity of self rather than fragmentation into incompatible "before" and "after" identities.

There is a reversal of roles between the forgiver and the forgiven. While in Jewish tradition the perception is that a person sins and therefore asks God for forgiveness, here the individual acknowledges God's "sin" and forgives Him for the "mistake" He created. This constitutes a radical move in the theological sense regarding the power dynamics between the individual and the divine.

Gratitude further structures this process of resilience. The prayer explicitly acknowledges "the loving support of those who understand" and "the courage of those who came before me," situating the individual within a trans-generational moral community. Resilience is thus constructed relationally rather than individualistically. The self is sustained not by isolated strength, but by recognition of collective endurance and inherited courage. Prayer becomes a site where personal vulnerability is embedded within shared history and communal affirmation.

As a coping mechanism, the prayer ritualizes uncertainty rather than denying it. Top surgery entails medical risk and unpredictable outcomes, and the prayer neither promises success nor invokes divine intervention as control. Instead, prayer functions as a symbolic holding environment, allowing fear, hope, gratitude, and anticipation to coexist. The statement "I cannot wait for tomorrow" expresses fragile futurity rather than triumphal certainty. Such restrained hope is particularly significant in contexts where outcomes are uncertain and institutional support may be ambivalent or hostile.

The prayer also reconciles religious contradiction, though not through doctrinal resolution or halakhic justification. For many trans Jews, God is experienced simultaneously as the source of life and as implicated in suffering. Rather than resolving this tension, the prayer holds it ritually. The act of forgiving God reverses conventional hierarchies in which humans seek forgiveness from the divine, repositioning God as a relational partner rather than an unquestionable authority. Contradiction is thus not erased but reworked through intimacy and performance.

This reconciliation is further enacted through liturgical language. The blessing formula—*Baruch atah Yah Eloheinu Ru'ach ha'olam*—employs non-normative theological grammar by naming God as *Ru'ach* (spirit), destabilizing gendered and sovereign divine imagery while preserving recognizable liturgical structure. Tradition is neither rejected nor abandoned; it is re-voiced. The prayer remains legible as Jewish liturgy even as it subtly queers the theological assumptions embedded within it.

Through these moves, the prayer articulates a queer typology of struggle that resists trans stigma, violence, and discrimination without explicitly naming them. In a social world that polices trans bodies and conditions legitimacy on medical, legal, or religious authorization, the prayer asserts that authority flows from honesty and courage rather than external recognition. The line "I pray to You that my honesty and courage will empower others to become themselves" frames transition not as transgression but as ethical commitment. Visibility is repositioned from a site of danger to a covenantal act, offering symbolic resources for resisting shame and internalized stigma.

Importantly, although this prayer is voiced in the first-person singular, it is readily collectivized. Its language allows trans readers to recognize themselves within a shared grammar of struggle, forming an interpretive community of resilience. Individual prayer thus becomes socially legible without relinquishing its intimacy, bridging private experience and collective meaning.

The prayer fosters subjective and identity-based empowerment by reconstituting the trans subject as a theological agent. The speaker blesses God not for changing them, but for accompanying them "to peace," reversing normative religious hierarchies in which trans lives are judged or permitted by external authority. Empowerment here is not framed as conquest, completion, or final resolution. Instead, it emerges as ongoing alignment between truth, body, and future. Such non-triumphalist empowerment is particularly suited to lives shaped by ongoing precarity, offering a sustainable form of agency grounded in ethical self-authorship rather than victory.

Taken together, *A Prayer before Top Surgery* demonstrates how transgender prayer can function as a practice of survival, interpretation, and empowerment. By integrating vulnerability into continuity, sanctifying uncertainty, and queering inherited religious forms from within, the prayer transforms liturgy into a form of resilience and a subtle yet powerful mode of religious and political resistance.

E.

A Prayer for Starting Testosterone Therapy

Rabbi Lior Bar-Ami

You are full of Praise, WORKER OF MIRACLES, CREATOR OF WONDERS,
I come before You in a time of transformation, seeking strength and guidance.

As I embark on this journey of self-discovery and growth,
I ask for Your blessings upon the changes that lie ahead.
Grant me the courage to embrace my true identity with love and compassion,
To navigate the challenges that may arise with resilience and understanding.

May this testosterone therapy be a tool for healing and empowerment,
Helping me align my inner and outer selves, finding harmony in who I am.
As I take this step towards becoming my authentic self,
I pray for wisdom to make informed decisions and care for my body and soul.

May Your presence be with me throughout this process,
And may I find comfort and support within the Jewish community and beyond.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה	Baruch ata
יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵנוּ	Adonai, Elohejnu
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם.	Melech ha'olam,
אֲשֶׁר מַנְחֶה אוֹתָנוּ בִּנְתִיבֵי	ascher manche otanu benetiwej
הַשִּׁנּוּי וְהַהִתְחַדְּשׁוּת.	haschinuj wehahitchadschut.

Blessed are You,
ADONAI, OUR GOD,
who guides us on our paths
of transformation and renewal.

This prayer (see https://opensiddur.org/prayers/life-cycle/living/well-being-health-and-caregiving/prayer-for-starting-testosterone-therapy-by-lior-bar-ami/) (accessed on 28 April 2026) can be read as a performative religious text that actively contributes to the development of resilience, coping mechanisms, and positive meaning-making among transgender individuals, while simultaneously negotiating and partially resolving religious contradictions surrounding gender, embodiment, and divine authority. Rather than treating prayer as a passive reflection of an already coherent identity, the text positions prayer itself as a constitutive practice—a ritual process through which uncertainty, vulnerability, and

transformation are symbolically processed and rendered meaningful. The initiation of testosterone therapy is framed not merely as a medical intervention [40], but as a spiritually charged moment situated within a broader narrative of divine guidance, ethical responsibility, and communal belonging.

By invoking divine accompaniment at a "time of transformation," the prayer offers a language through which fear, ambivalence, and bodily uncertainty can be held without being pathologized. Resilience here is not articulated as individual perseverance alone, but as a relational and interpretive achievement, emerging from the alignment of body and soul, the ethical care of the self, and the expectation of communal support. In this sense, prayer operates as a coping mechanism that re-signifies hormonal treatment from a site of dysphoria or social stigma into a meaningful act of sacred becoming. Such positive meaning-making is achieved not through denial of struggle, but through its ritual acknowledgment and theological reframing.

A central religious contradiction confronted by many transgender individuals—the tension between divine creation and gender transition—is addressed in this prayer not through doctrinal argumentation but through liturgical performance. Testosterone therapy is named as a "tool for healing and empowerment," thereby collapsing the binary between divine will and human intervention. The body is constructed as neither deficient nor oppositional to the divine, but as a sacred instrument through which truth, authenticity, and renewal are realized. This non-dualistic understanding of embodiment enables the reconciliation of religious contradiction by situating bodily transformation within a theology of guidance and renewal rather than deviation or rupture.

The prayer also reveals a distinctly queer typology of struggle, in which resistance to trans stigma, violence, and exclusion is enacted through the creative reappropriation of religious language. By embedding gender-affirming care within classical Jewish blessing formulae, the prayer queers normative liturgical structures from within, expanding their semantic and ritual boundaries. This move resists medicalized or pathologizing framings of trans bodies while simultaneously contesting religious narratives that render them illegible or morally suspect. Struggle, in this context, is not only oppositional but reparative: it seeks not to abandon tradition, but to transform it into a site capable of holding trans lives.

Coping with stigma is further enacted through the construction of an ethical and morally responsible self. The prayer's emphasis on wisdom, informed decision-making, and care for both body and soul directly counters dominant cultural narratives that depict transgender individuals as confused, impulsive, or ethically compromised. Instead, the trans subject is presented as a moral agent whose bodily decisions are thoughtful, sacred, and accountable. Prayer thus functions as a moral framework that shields against stigma by affirming the legitimacy of trans embodiment within a religious ethical framework.

At the same time, the prayer emphasizes that bodily transformation is inherently relational—a premise that may encounter resistance and critique even within the transgender community itself. The explicit appeal for comfort and support "within the Jewish community and beyond" acknowledges that resilience and empowerment are socially mediated and dependent upon recognition by an interpretive community. The prayer implicitly critiques religious spaces that withhold such recognition while simultaneously imagining alternative communal configurations capable of sustaining trans lives. In doing so, it transforms private bodily change into a publicly blessable and socially intelligible act, thereby fostering subjective, identity-based empowerment.

This interpretive analysis affirms the author's motivation. As Rabbi Ben-Ami explains, "the prayer emerged from a concrete pastoral and embodied moment: accompanying trans Jews at the threshold of medical transition, a moment often marked by profound hope, fear, agency, and vulnerability":

> "I wanted to offer a Jewish language that does not stand at a distance from the body, but speaks from within bodily change. One of the central challenges in writing the prayer was negotiating the tension between continuity and rupture. Jewish prayer is deeply shaped by fixed forms, inherited blessings, and a theology that often presumes stability of categories—gender among them."

At the same time, Jewish tradition is also rich in narratives of transformation: Abram becoming Abraham, Sarai becoming Sarah, Jacob becoming Israel; bodies marked by covenant, names changed, lives redirected. I understand transition as standing firmly within this lineage of becoming, rather than outside of it. The prayer intentionally adapts the classical brachah structure not to resolve contradiction, but to dwell within it. By blessing God as the One "who guides us on our paths of transformation and renewal," the prayer reframes transition as a sacred process (derech), echoing rabbinic understandings of life as ongoing movement rather than fixed essence. In this sense, resilience is not imagined as stoic endurance of suffering, but as the Jewish capacity to generate meaning, blessing, and relationality precisely in moments of uncertainty. At the same time, this prayer is not addressed only to religiously observant or institutionally affiliated Jews. It also intentionally speaks to trans Jews who are no longer religious, who move in and out of Jewish practice, or who have never experienced themselves as "religious" at all".

Taken together, this prayer illustrates how transgender liturgy functions as a queer religious praxis through which resilience is cultivated, religious contradiction is negotiated, and struggle against stigma and exclusion is symbolically enacted. The trans body is not positioned at the margins of Jewish religious life but emerges as a central ritual actor, moral subject, and sacred site of becoming. Prayer, in this context, operates not only as spiritual expression but as a sociological mechanism for coping, resistance, and the ongoing reconstitution of religious meaning itself. As Rabbi Ben-Ami argues:

> "Jewish prayer here functions not as a demand for belief, but as a cultural, ethical, and ancestral language—one that can be taken up selectively, reinterpreted, or even held ambivalently. For many trans Jews, especially those alienated by religious harm, prayer can become a reclaimed inheritance rather than an obligation: a way of naming transition through Jewish words without requiring submission to Jewish authority. In this sense, the prayer offers belonging without coercion, and continuity without conformity.
>
> Prayer here functions as a queer Jewish typology: it queers liturgy not by abandoning tradition, but by stretching it—reinscribing divine presence into places where Jewish language has often been silent or exclusionary. The prayer refuses a theology in which God is the guarantor of static binaries, and instead invokes a God who accompanies change, whose creative power (ma'aseh nisim, borei nifla'ot) is ongoing and embodied.
>
> For trans individuals, this kind of prayer can serve as a powerful counter-practice to stigma, violence, and religious alienation. It asserts that transition is not a deviation from Jewish life, but a mode of participating in it; not a problem to be justified, but an experience worthy of blessing. When held in community, such prayer can also challenge communal norms, inviting Jewish spaces to expand their imagination of who is speaking, who is blessed, and whose bodies are sites of holiness".

F.

A Prayer upon Hair Removal for Vaginoplasty

And ELOKIM remembered Rachel,
and ZE listened to her
and opened her womb…
and she said, "ELOKIM has gathered in my shame!" (Genesis 30:22-23)

MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE,
behold, my lips are uncircumcised!
SOURCE OF LIFE,
You put the soul in the blood,
but my source of blood is not revealed.
Those who seek my soul saw a sight and did not know (Isaiah 6:9)—
they examined my land and spread an evil report about it (Numbers 13:32).
So now, MY GOD, I have come up to the lip of the sea,
but I cannot cross through it to freedom,
because, look, it is not cut!
My heart is ready, ELOKIM, my heart is ready! (Psalms 57:8)
Who will give me a wing like a bird?
I would fly off and find rest! (Psalms 55:7)

But you did not split the sea
until Nachshon jumped in and sank first (Sotah 37a).
Therefore I have come to this step,
to clear the path with burning fire and heat,
as it is written, Now when this touches your lips,
your sin shall be cleared and your misdeeds atoned for! (Isaiah 6:7)

Because I have been driven out like a person from upon their land (Jeremiah 27:10 and Isaiah 6:12),
and I say, HASHEM, how long?! (Isaiah 6:11)
And while its hair remains on it and it comes back,
it shall be burned until it becomes like a redwood or an oak,
which keep their trunks in the fall—
its trunk shall be sacred seed! (Isaiah 6:13)

HASHEM, GOD OF MY REDEMPTION,
uncover my nakedness before you,

and I will be your eternal maidservant!
Let me merit to fulfill the verse, HASHEM,
"open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise." (Psalms 51:17)
Split apart the evil decree
and lead me upright to my land,
as it is written, "Return, my soul, to your rest,
for HASHEM has bestowed upon you!" (Psalms 116:7)
May it be desired!

Let not the child of the foreigner gathered to HASHEM say,
"HASHEM has fully separated me from ZIR people,"
and let not the saris say,
"Behold, I am a dried-out tree!"
For this is what HASHEM has said to the sarisim
who keep My Shabbats
and choose what I desire
and hold tightly onto My pact:
"I shall give them,
in My House and within My walls
empowerment and recognition; better than sons and daughters,
an everlasting name I will give to those
who are not cut off [from Me]." (Isaiah 56:3-5)

And ZE said, "Raise up, raise up!
Clear a path!
Remove all obstacles
from the path of my people!" (Isaiah 57:14)

Sing, sterile woman who has not birthed!
Burst into song and rejoice, she who has not borne the pangs of birth!
For greater are the children of the deserted
than the children of the married, says HASHEM!
Make space for your tent,
spread out the cloths of your dwellings—
do not hold back, lengthen the ropes and strengthen the spikes!
For you will burst forth right and left,
and your seed shall disinherit nations and settle the deserted cities.
Do not fear, because you will not be shamed;
and do not blush, because you will not be disgraced—

for you will forget the shame of your youth,
and the disgrace of your solitude you will never remember again!
Because your partner is your maker, HASHEM OF MYRIADS is ZIR NAME,
and your redeemer is THE HOLY ONE OF YISRAEL, known as THE GOD OF ALL THE EARTH!
For while you were a sad and depressed woman, a woman among boys, HASHEM called you—
YOUR GOD said, "For a small moment I left you,
but I will take you in with great compassion.
In a bit of rage I hid my Face from you for a minute,
but with eternal love I give you a womb," says your redeemer, HASHEM! (Isaiah 54:1-8)

THE ONE who makes the sterile home-bound woman
into a happy mother of children—
praise GOD! (Psalms 113:9)

A Prayer upon Hair Removal for Vaginoplasty is the first of seven prayers offered in The Em haBanim's Prayers for Vaginoplasty) (see: https://opensiddur.org/prayers/life-cycle/living/well-being-health-and-caregiving/prayer-upon-hair-removal-for-vaginoplasty-by-the-em-habanim/) (accessed on 28 April 2026). The prayer situates the transgender experience within a deeply spiritual and scriptural framework, allowing the individual to construct resilience, coping mechanisms, and positive meaning-making within a context of social stigma and marginalization. By invoking biblical verses about fertility, barrenness, and divine promise, the prayer provides a narrative in which the transgender body is not a source of shame but rather a site of correction, recognition, and empowerment. For example, references to the parting of the Red Sea and the figure of Nachshon illustrate how the medical act of hair removal prior to vaginoplasty is positioned as a liminal, risk-laden, and courageous action, necessary for spiritual and bodily redemption. This framing transforms the painful and anxiety-inducing experience into a resource of coping, embedding it within a narrative that confers purpose, value, and meaning.

This process of bodily transformation is further articulated through the prayer's creative reinterpretation of biblical language, in which traditional scriptural metaphors are transferred onto the transgender body. A particularly striking example of this linguistic and theological reappropriation appears in the opening declaration, "behold, my lips are uncircumcised." This phrase constitutes a sophisticated form of scriptural wordplay that draws upon Moses' declaration of being "uncircumcised of lips" (Exod. 6:12, 30), where "lips" signify a perceived inadequacy of speech and an inability to communicate effectively. Yet, within the context of a prayer accompanying preparation for vaginoplasty, the English term *lips* simultaneously evokes the labia, producing a layered metaphor that links biblical language with embodied gender transformation. Through this deliberate ambiguity, the prayer re-signifies a familiar scriptural expression, shifting the symbolism of circumcision from the realm of speech to the gendered body itself. In doing so, it reframes the biblical themes of covenant, embodiment, and transformation through the lived experience of gender affirmation. This linguistic and theological move demonstrates how transgender liturgy can reinterpret inherited Jewish textual traditions, creating new meanings while maintaining continuity with the sacred sources from which it emerges.

Like the previous prayers, this particular text also addresses the classical dualism found in many religious traditions, in which body and soul are treated as separate, or the transgender body is constructed as "unfit" or "imperfect." The line, "*You put the soul in the blood, but my source of blood is not revealed,*" reflects the tension between normative theological models and lived transgender embodiment. The prayer integrates body and soul into a sacred space in which acts of corporeal transformation—here, hair removal—are not sinful but sanctifying. The corporeal and spiritual realms intersect, illustrating a non-dualistic, embodied spirituality that affirms transgender embodiment.

In terms of combating stigma and marginalization, the prayer constructs a queer typology of struggle. Biblical references to eunuchs, barren women, and outsiders demonstrate how individuals excluded or judged by social and religious norms can be repositioned as recipients of divine favor: "*I shall give them. . . empowerment and recognition; better than sons and daughters.*" This establishes a framework for subjective, identity-based empowerment, wherein the individual's self-worth and spiritual validation are grounded not in social acceptance but in divine acknowledgment. The prayer functions as a form of queer spiritual pedagogy, transforming struggles over the body and identity into spaces of meaning-making, resilience, and empowerment.

Finally, the prayer reconciles religious contradiction inherent in many transgender experiences. It allows the individual to inhabit both a transgender body and a religious identity without negating either. By combining familiar scriptural sources with intimate, embodied experience, it connects experiences of pain, isolation, and social stigma with hope, redemption, and empowerment. This renders the prayer a mechanism of *positive meaning-making*: suffering, bodily transformation, and social marginalization are integrated into a narrative that produces strength, self-recognition, and spiritual belonging.

Overall, the prayer illustrates how transgender liturgy can serve as a resilience space, a site of queer struggle, and a tool for identity affirmation. It transforms the body into a spiritual and symbolic instrument of empowerment, navigating religious tension while fostering subjective agency, self-worth, and community recognition. Through its scriptural intertextuality and embodied focus, the prayer demonstrates that transgender liturgy can both contest and reinterpret religious norms, offering a sacred space where social marginalization is reframed as spiritual significance.

5. Discussion

This study demonstrates how trans prayer can be understood as a resource of resilience and coping, and as a form of positive meaning-making that moves from dysphoria toward sacred alignment. This liturgy seeks to reconcile religious contradiction and presents prayer as a queer typology of struggle. The individual stands at the center of this liturgical practice, which foregrounds subjective and identity-based empowerment.

The creation of contemporary Jewish prayers for transgender people offers a clear example of how queer theology moves from a critical stance toward a constructive or positive theological mode. Rather than merely deconstructing heteronormative religious language, such prayers actively reconfigure the relationship between body, identity, and sacredness, so that transgender experience is not positioned as an exception to divine order but as a site where the divine is revealed. For instance, prayers addressing bodily transition, gender affirmation, or experiences of dysphoria may frame the body not as a problem to be corrected but as a space of ongoing creation, transformation, and revelation. In this sense, they resonate with Marcella Althaus-Reid's [41] concept of "indecent theology," which locates theological knowledge in marginalized and embodied lives, and with Cheng's work, which emphasizes the capacity of queer experience to generate full theological systems rather than merely critique tradition. Within this framework, prayer becomes more than

an expression of identity; it functions as a performative act that reconstitutes the very possibility of faith, producing a language in which transness is not opposed to sanctity but participates in it, thus enacting a shift from a theology of resistance to a theology of creation.

The prayers incorporate diverse psychological and symbolic themes, including narrative integration, internal authority and epistemic trust, and the containment of uncertainty. Trans prayer, as exemplified in this text, builds resilience by anchoring gender transition in continuity, supports coping by sanctifying uncertainty, and generates positive meaning by framing embodiment as sacred alignment. At the same time, it reconciles religious contradiction not through doctrinal resolution, but through ritual performance. In doing so, it queers inherited typologies of body and soul and equips trans individuals with symbolic resources to resist stigma, violence, and erasure. Thus, it reflects a sociological understanding in which journeys of identity and embodiment are shaped not only by individual belief, but also by community affirmation and broader normative structures.

In this sense, trans prayer represents what I call a form of *transcendent lobbying*: an attempt to engage with the "divine authority" or established theological frameworks, encouraging them to acknowledge the gendered realities of transgender individuals and incorporate their existence within the spiritual realm.

Central to the prayer is a non-dualistic conception of body and soul, articulating a deeply embodied spirituality. In contrast to classical Western dualisms that separate body from soul or mind, the text presents the physical body as inseparable from the soul's truth. The body is not a vessel to be transcended but a mirror and expressive medium through which inner truth, expansiveness, and authenticity are revealed.

The prayer reclaims the body as a sacred site of divine encounter and self-authentication. It resists hegemonic religious and cultural narratives that deny agency over one's embodied self. Through liturgical language, the individual authorizes their identity as both truthful and blessed, contesting the assumption that religious traditions are inherently antagonistic to bodily or gender diversity. In this sense, the sociology of the body, as revealed through the prayer, exceeds its classical role as an analytical framework for understanding discipline and control. Instead, it emerges as a site of empowerment, improvisation, and resistance—particularly within spiritual contexts. The body becomes both canvas and sanctuary, a locus of sacred meaning-making in which truth is known not despite the body, but through it.

The act of forgiving God exemplifies a radical theological gesture that positions the body as an active site of agency, power, and dialogue between cisnormative theology and queer embodiment. Far from being a passive object awaiting correction, the body serves as a medium through which identity, resistance, and affirmation are articulated. Within the context of bodily transformation and surgery, it becomes an archive of memory and intergenerational queer and trans agency, performing not only personal change but also signaling possibilities for others. These prayers inscribe the trans body into sacred ritual language, framing surgery as a spiritual rite of passage and a site where theology, ethics, and ritual converge. In doing so, the trans body emerges as both author and altar—a sociological agent of transformation, materially reshaped, spiritually anchored, and socially situated.

Moreover, trans liturgy becomes not only an act of faith, but also a practice of survival, interpretation, and empowered self-authorship. This trans-affirming liturgy embodies and advances what Blatt, Hartal, and Sasson-Levy [42] term "trans vitapolitics"—a framework that infuses trans experience with agency, vitality, and complexity as a foundation for political action. It represents a spiritual articulation of Jewish queer activism, emerging not only within LGBTQ+ religious organizations [43], but also among LGBTQ+ clergy themselves. Furthermore, this study, alongside the work of Blus-Kadosh and Hartal [44],

demonstrates how advocacy can operate as a structural, rather than merely personal, mechanism for trans inclusion. While Blus-Kadosh and Hartal emphasize advocacy in healthcare as essential for addressing the bodily and mental needs of trans individuals, my research shows that trans-affirming Jewish liturgy functions in a parallel manner: transforming prayer into a political act that recognizes, legitimizes, and empowers trans and non-binary identities. Together, these studies call for institutional transformation that embeds inclusion within core practices, thereby reducing reliance on individual initiative.

From a sociological perspective, the prayer demonstrates how religious language can legitimize non-normative bodily experiences and gendered identities. By invoking divine affirmation of a truth that may elude external comprehension, the speaker challenges dominant sociocultural regimes that regulate, classify, and discipline bodies—particularly queer, trans, and non-binary bodies—within rigid binary frameworks.

Similar to Stern [45], who showed that sacred texts are not merely religious writings but a central tool through which social, cultural, and theological meaning is generated, shaping the way religious groups imagine, express, and operate in relation to the land, tradition, and internal dialogue, I also view these texts as a platform for creating a religious-spiritual discourse about the transgender individual—their body, their diverse experiences, their identity dialogue with themselves and their surroundings, and, of course, with God and the tradition of Israel.

This has a genuinely therapeutic character, demonstrating how the prayer serves as an additional means for restoration, healing, and community resilience. Similar to Guzmen-Carmeli and Rubin [46], who showed that religious texts can function as a therapeutic space, I observe that the creators of these prayers—particularly those who themselves have faced bodily and psychological experiences as transgender individuals—compose texts of healing and resilience.

Future research will aim to examine how transgender individuals experience this prayer and engage in negotiation with it. How do they interpret and articulate the text, and perhaps also in what spaces and in what ways do they perform it? Follow-up studies on this phenomenon, like the present research, shed light on how religious communities and leadership evolve and are reshaped with the inclusion of people with diverse gender identities.

Furthermore, the choice to compose queer Jewish liturgy in English, while incorporating Hebrew terms—biblical expressions, newly coined gender-neutral language, and at times everyday linguistic expressions—is not merely a technical decision of accessibility, but rather a theoretical act of linguistic formation. It can be understood as expressing the idea that liturgical queerness is not limited to the content of prayer or the identity of its intended audience, but also extends to the ways in which language itself is dismantled and reconstructed. English functions here as an "open" liturgical language, enabling semantic plurality and addressing global audiences, while Hebrew operates as a source of authority, textual memory, and ritual continuity. Their combination produces a hybrid space in which religious authority is no longer anchored in a single language, but instead circulates between different linguistic codes [47].

Within this framework, the queerness of the prayer is also enacted through the breaking and reconfiguration of linguistic structures: Hebrew is no longer stable as a "sacred source" language, but is translated, transliterated, and at times creatively distorted, while English ceases to function as a transparent medium and instead becomes an experimental site for the production of religious meaning. Thus, queer liturgy does not only articulate alternative gendered identities; it also destabilizes linguistic hierarchies and offers an understanding of language as a dynamic space in which identity, authority, and religious meaning are simultaneously constructed and undone.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that contemporary transgender Jewish prayer functions not only as a form of spiritual expression, but also as a sociological, theological, and embodied practice of resilience, self-authorship, and communal recognition. By framing gender transition and embodied authenticity as sacred rather than contradictory to religious life, these prayers challenge normative theological and linguistic boundaries while constructing alternative modes of belonging within Judaism. Trans liturgy thus emerges as a dynamic site where body, identity, language, and ritual intersect, transforming prayer into a performative space of healing, empowerment, and queer theological creativity. More broadly, this research highlights the capacity of contemporary religious traditions to adapt, negotiate, and reimagine themselves in response to evolving understandings of gender, embodiment, and human dignity.

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